


1978

A Handful of English: An Inventory of Typical American Gestures

Margaret L. Clement
School for International Training

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Communication Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Clement, Margaret L., "A Handful of English: An Inventory of Typical American Gestures" (1978). *MA TESOL Collection*. 246.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/246

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

A HANDFUL OF ENGLISH:

An Inventory of Typical American Gestures

Margaret (Peg) L. Clement
B.A. Mount Holyoke College

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

August, 1978

ABSTRACT

A Handful of English is a collection and description of some fifty typical North American gestures, with photographs and commentary on each one. In addition, there is a discussion of nonverbal communication (body movement, the science of kinesics), a section on the importance of using gestures in the ESL classroom and pointers on how to use them effectively. Finally, the project includes ESL classroom applications, including sample dialogues and techniques.

This project by Margaret (Peg) L. Clement is accepted in its present form.

Date 8/18/78

Principal Advisor: Alex Silverman

Alex Silverman

Project Reader: Peter Messinger

Peter E. Messinger

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	p. 1
Sources - Where I got my Inventory	p. 2
Introduction	p. 4
Definitions.....	p. 5
Types of Gestures.....	p. 7
Discussion.....	p. 8
Americans and Their Gestures.....	p. 17
The Photographs.....	p. 19
The Inventory:	
Children's Gestures.....	p. 21
Adult Gestures.....	p. 27
Conventional Gestures.....	p. 33
Complicity, Duplicity and Fraternity.....	p. 50
Insult and Vulgarly.....	p. 56
Jubilant and Approval	p. 61
Hope and Good Luck	p. 67
Self-congratulatory Gestures.....	p. 71
Nervousness, Impatience and Boredom	p. 75
Other Gestures.....	p. 80
Why Use Gestures?.....	p. 90
How.....	p. 92
Classroom Applications.....	p. 93
Appendix #1.....	p. 106

1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance with this project: Mr. George McFadden, who took all the pictures; Mr. Robert Couch, who developed some of them; Nick and Abe, two students who posed for a few of the pictures; former President Nixon and other politicians who unwittingly posed for my observation, plus innumerable other colleagues and friends and people of the street who were, unbeknownst to them, perfect models of these American gestures; Mr. Ray Clark who coaxed the first ideas and recorded his observations of my gestures as an ESL teacher; Mr. Fred Breunig who gave me some information from his storehouse of knowledge of American Folklore; my advisor, Mr. Alex Silverman, and my reader, Mr. Peter Messinger, both of whom endured.

SOURCES--WHERE I GOT MY INVENTORY

I began as a skeptic. I had always been convinced that Americans had very few gestures of any worth--only a lot of pointless motioning, circling, pounding, pointing, waving. I was sure, especially after observing and learning the many gestures of the Mediterranean countries, that Americans were sadly deficient in this area. I was like many Americans in thinking so. But, many observation hours later, I have changed my mind. Where did I get the "stuff" for this project and for the change of conviction?

--Constant and direct observation and recording of gestural behavior in natural situations, daily activities, street scenes, cafeteria settings, etc.

--Motion pictures, including silent movies.

--Television, especially press conferences, debates and panel shows. Mass media has spread and standardized most American gestures.

--Newspaper and magazine pictures.

--Several reference books (see Bibliography), mostly journalistic in nature, and two books of a sensationalist style that were aimed at exploiting the new interest in body language.

--Observation of my teachers in classes, and verbal interviews with them.

--Observation of myself as a teacher and as an American.

--Others' observations of me as a teacher in an ESL classroom.

--Querying of other Americans, and more revealingly of some foreigners as to what they perceived to be typically American gestures.

The criteria for my including a certain gesture in this study were:

--It must be common enough for most Americans to readily recognize and understand. This would be an indication of its widespread usage across age lines,

sex lines, regional, socio-economical and ethnical lines.

--It must not be too specifically related to any one region, or any one age or ethnic group. Many of our American gestures were "borrowed" from other cultures, and then changed in some way; I have included a few of these.

INTRODUCTION

I remember a quote from Balzac in which he observes that speech obscures, but gestures reveal. We have an expression that a picture can say a thousand words; a gesture is a form of picture. The word "gesture" comes from a Latin root, "gerer," meaning to comport or show oneself. And any person in any culture in the world naturally shows him or herself. Gesturing is both a learned and an instinctive action. When I was searching in the libraries, I found articles on gestures by archeologists, anthropologists, linguists, folklorists, psychiatrists, psychologists, professors, novelists, sociologists, sign language specialists, journalists, and students of the American Indian. Some cultures, such as the Mediterranean ones, seem to use gestures more often, or more explicitly than others, but in all cultures we can find some kind of body motion, or nonverbal communication.

In this study, I propose to give a general discussion of nonverbal communication, which includes body motion and gesticulation--the science of kinesics. Then, I will portray and discuss some fifty "typically" or "classically" North American gestures; their histories, if any; their exact make-up and any verbal behavior that might accompany them. Finally, I will offer several sample dialogues and other ideas for lesson plans that may be used to help teach American gestures in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. In an appendix, I will mention other fields of interest that are related to this paper.

DEFINITIONS

Many scholars have studied, defined and tried to classify gestures. Some of the definitions that these people have used, in chronological order are:

Birdwhistel, 1952: "What we popularly call gestures...are revealed by analysis to be specially bound kinemorphs which cannot appear in isolation as a complete action. That is, gestures are like stem forms in language in that they are always bound up in a more complex package, an analysis of which must be completed before the 'social meaning' of the complex can be assessed."¹

Alfred Hayes, 1965: "The study of 'gesture' is, of course, nothing new. Kinesics includes the study of gestures, but only as certain stereotyped aspects which are often a clear substitute for linguistic behavior, e.g. pointing, nodding, shaking the head, waving the hand, and bowing."²

Francis Hayes, 1966: "Any bodily movement excepting that of vocalization made consciously or unconsciously to communicate either with one's self or with another. Additionally, we may include such semantic acts as 'throwing down the gauntlet,' or chauvinistically waving a flag, wherein something besides the body is needed to make the gesture complete."³

Green, 1968: Green accepts A. Hayes' definition of gesture but with the following qualifications: "1) Gesture, although learned, is largely an unconscious, out-of-awareness, cultural phenomena; 2) Communication with one's self is not considered; 3) Movements which are manifestations of nervous or anxious behavior fall outside the general rubric of gesture."⁴

Fiel, 1970: "Gesture is the short cut...a summing up of something that cannot or will not be put into words."⁵

Harrison, 1974: Harrison uses the word emblem as a substitute for gesture and defines it as "a highly stylized nonverbal sign or sign pattern which is widely understood within the user's culture or subculture...They can easily be translated into a word or a phrase. They can also exist alone, without any direct relationship to verbal signs. In addition, they can be used to reinforce, supplement or countermand information in the verbal band."⁶

Webster's Third New International Dictionary, under "pasimology": "(prob. from Greek, "pasi," for all, + "sema," for sign): The study of gesture as a means of communication." Under "gesture": "the use of motions of the limbs or body as a means of intentional expression--may be deliberate...or even symbolic."⁷

Thus, most scholars of the science of kinesics, and specifically of gestures, agree that gesture is a sign or sign pattern that either reinforces or replaces verbal behavior, and that is often determined by the user's culture. Whether gestures are learned or instinctive (or both) depends on the gesture, the user and the context. These ideas, then, are what I have used in formulating a definition of gesture and in choosing the American gestures herein.

TYPES OF GESTURES

In the introduction to his incredibly exhaustive working bibliography of gestures (1954), Hayes defines gestures and gives three main types:

1. folk: such things as nodding the head, shaking hands, flipping the A-OK sign, etc.
2. technical: includes Indian sign language and the deaf and dumb Sign Language.
3. autistic: such things as doodling, swinging objects in the hand and tics.

Some gestures fall into two or all three gestures at once.

Other less scholarly writers, such as recent exploiters of the interest in body language (Julius Fast, 1972 and Maxine Fiel, 1970 as examples), attempt to classify all body movement into such nebulous categories as extrovertive and introvertive (Fiel) while attaching certain psychological traits to both. I find these divisions useless in my project here, as they tend to appeal to the fad interest in the psyche, and only superficially speak to the issues. The Hayes' categories above (folk, technical, autistic) have been adopted here, and the majority of my documented gestures fall into the "folk" category.

DISCUSSION

Like ideas and words, gestures have a life of their own. They are born; they migrate; they change; and sometimes they disappear entirely. Unfortunately, we know little of the origin, geographical distribution and history of gestures. We could probably study literary texts, statues, paintings and other art forms to learn more.⁸

Many studies have been done of Spanish gestures and their appearance in dramas and literary works (Green, 1968); of French gestures (Wylie, 1977; Life magazine, 1946); Latin gestures (Saitz, 1962); and immigrant Jews' and Italians' gestures (Efron, 1972). Gestures can be observed in every culture, and the North American culture is not an exception. But, except for Saitz's limited contrastive study with Colombian gestures, no comprehensive work has ever been done to document an inventory of American gestures. Why is this?

It is often Americans who undertake these works about other cultures. Extensive research about others is always underway in the farthest corners of the world, but, it appears, not at home. It has not been considered, perhaps, by anyone American to study their own culture's gestures. Compounded with this would be the fact that most everyone has believed that Americans (except native Indians) do not even have a wealth of native gestures worth looking at.

When the subject of gestures is mentioned, many people quickly conjure up images of Italians gesticulating madly and the expression that they would be speechless if one tied their hands behind their backs. The French, too, enjoy much fame for their hand language, due to the recent success of popular journalistic articles on the subject. What are some of the characteristics of other, notably Mediterranean, cultures? By way of illustration, and to give a glimpse of the possibilities of cross-cultural analyses, I have chosen a few Mediterranean cultures:

French: "For centuries most Frenchmen have felt compelled to supplement the

spoken word with unconsciously violent gestures, and facial contortions which are so graphic that Americans often wonder why they bother with speech at all."⁹ Many articles as well as many entire books (including the excellent Beaux Gestes by Laurence Wylie of Boston, which gave me much inspiration in the writing of this paper) have been written on French body talk. Ruesch and Kees, in a chapter entitled "Biology and Culture," say, "The basic communicative philosophy of the French reveals itself in the desire to display style and taste in word, gesture and action."¹⁰ The authors speak of the refinement, the courtly chivalrous ideas and polish in the French lives, and sum it up by saying that their "gestures are stylized expressions of emotions, calculated and executed with elegance and precision. It is more the sequence of whole actions which are interpreted as gestures."¹¹ Probably the most famous French gestures are what Wylie calls Le Pied du Nez. (a double thumbing of the nose); the Bras d'Honneur, known in English as The Royal Shaft, made by the arms and used as one of the "most infuriating insults;"¹² the nose-twisting gesture to indicate someone's drunkenness; and the famous "Je m'en fous" shrug and expression of utter indifference on the face, also related to the American shrug (see photo #38).

Italian: Everyone has heard it said about Italians that if you tied their hands behind their backs, they would be rendered speechless. From what I have observed, Italians tend to use very undefined, wide movements with their hands and arms, what Harrison (1974) calls pictographs, batons, ideographs and kinetographs¹³, all of which trace, draw, point, recreate or punctuate the speech. This is opposed to the kind of gesturing that is clear, concise and defineable that can be observed and catalogued easily. Wylie (1977) refutes the Italians' reputation as he says, "As a matter of fact...the Italians do not gesture that

much more than the French. They look more animated because of the manner in which they gesticulate."¹⁴ Reusch and Kees (1966) contrast the Americans and Italians as being polar opposites in their expression, saying that "Present-day Italians live in a climate of passionate emotional expression...Generally, Italian gesture tends to be emphatic, illustrative, redundant, and flamboyant, and probably has changed little in character since the time of the early Romans."¹⁵

Immigrant Jews in New York City: Efron (1972) did a very scholarly report on the gestures of immigrant Jews of New York City, and the Jewish gestures have always been a subject of close scrutiny, stemming from Biblical times. Reusch and Kees (1966) state that Jews "pay little attention to the nonverbal symbolic, and use movement largely to support words...Gesticulation is aimed directly at another person and usually is carried out with the lower arm, the upper arm being rigidly held to the side of the body."¹⁶ Efron claims that Jewish gestures are mostly of the discursive or ideographic type, with plenty of punctuating, accenting, and underlining.¹⁷

British: Most people consider the British to be rather unexpressive in their body language. The clichéed "stiff upper lip" of the British upper class is one of the few postures we can say is typically British. Also, in my inventory, I have mentioned the V-for-Victory sign, now well-known in America, but originally used during World War II by Sir Winston Churchill and others.

I consider most of the other Northern Europeans to be quite bland in their gesturing, with little or no arm movement, and few precise, observable gestures. This supports my theory that the most expressive body-talkers are the Mediterranean peoples.

Arab, (specifically North African): For most of the non-European cultures, there is very little documentation, or it is very obscure. In my experience in North Africa, the Arabs seem to have an inordinate number of very specific gestures - and, very picturesque. Gestures for "full," "empty," "same," "opposite," "finished," "broke--no money," "ugly," "you'll get yours!," "watch out!," regularly accompany Arab speech. There has just recently begun to be interesting literature about Arab paralinguistic features, postures, stances, distances and gestures.

It may be noted here that while there seems to be more and more articles appearing that discuss gestures in some way, most of them are inadequate in that much prejudice, stereotype and impression, as well as heresay, enters into the cross-cultural analysis, even in the best of the published material. There exists a real need for unbiased, documented cross-cultural studies of gestures, including American ones.

"The head and the face are perhaps man's richest sign system."¹⁸ The hands, too, can be very expressive, especially with certain movements of the fingers. The eye is poetically referred to as "the window of the soul."¹⁹ Sapir (in Mendelbaum, 1947) found that "the un verbalized communications are so important that one who is not intuitively familiar with them could be confused even if he were aware of their external structure and the accompanying verbal symbols."²⁰ Not only the face, eyes and hands, but the entire body and its movements often qualify the meaning of the spoken word and, "under certain circumstances, may even be indispensable to its proper interpretation."²¹ Gestures may even be likened to a secret code. Sapir said in 1927 that "we respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might say, in accor-

dance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all."²²

These special body movements are picked up as a part of one's society or culture. The typical gestures that I will show in this study are for the most part learned behavior (except for a few, such as a smile, which appear to be, at least sometimes, instinctive). Green (1968) says that "body idiom is a socially learned and patterned cultural phenomenon."²³

Another interesting facet of gestures is the kind of factors which determine them--racial descent, social class, age, sex, region of the country, personality. "The claim has been made that both the amount and the manner of gesticulation of an individual are basically determined by racial descent,"²⁴ or so says Efron in his ethnic study. He also claims in that study of immigrant Jews and Italians that the movements of the Western race in general are "rocking," "slightly swinging," and "soft,"²⁵ and that these tendencies could indeed be race-influenced. Efron quotes another expert, Karl Skraup, who postulated five different determining factors of bodily motion (gestural and otherwise) as: intellect, occupation, temperament, culture and race.²⁶ In the ensuing study of North American gestures, I have noted a gesture (Black Power Fist) that most likely is race-linked, and several very definitely age-related gestures (Chalking it Up, #33, Donkey Ears, #2). My observation of these gestures was, unfortunately, restricted to one region of the country, New England, and probably to more or less one kind of person: the middle class, young, educated student or professional. However, in my observation of television and magazine pictures, I believe most all classes, regions, ages and races of America were represented. Obviously, the determining factor of culture, as Efron suggests, is an all-important one here. Another equally important point to consider is that there are many personal gestures which are patently idiosyncratic, ones that are invented suddenly and do not survive,

ones that are a display of one's character or personality.

What we are talking about in this discussion of gestures and body movement is the science called kinesics. Kinesics is defined by Birdwhistel, one of the early experts, as "the study of body motion as related to the nonverbal aspects of inter-personal communication."²⁷ More recently (1960), he defined this science as "the study of the patterned and learned aspects of body motion which have communicational value."²⁸ The definition by Walsh (1963) reads: "The study of the non-vocal body motions which play a part in communication, such as gestures, raised eyebrows, shoulder shrugs, pursed lips and changes of stance."²⁹

Birdwhistel was the authority on kinesics and the first person to try to create an annotational system for documenting and recording body motion; he divided the body into eight sections in order to investigate all body movements, no matter how slight. They are:³⁰

- 1) The head
- 2) The face
- 3) The trunk and shoulders
- 4) The arm and wrist area
- 5) The hands and fingers
- 6) The hip
- 7) The leg and ankle area, including the foot
- 8) The neck

Whereas one could study the kinesics of any given culture with all eight areas under investigation (such as posture, leg crossing, arm motion while walking, staring and eye contact, scratching), I have left that work to the prying eyes of psychiatrists, anthropologists and book writers to give their hosts of meanings (such as aggression, defense, insecurity) to these motions.

The quite complicated and detailed annotational system mentioned above seems to be of little use to ESL teachers. (It would be useful, however, for scholars, dancers, politicians, actors and businessmen.) Birdwhistel devised "kinegraphs," full of arrows and lines to show the stops and starts and intensities of the movements of each of those eight sections of the body. With these graphs, he could record the non-linguistic behavior of that one part at any given moment.

Harrison, in his book Beyond Words, divided nonverbal behavior into six different "illustrators," which seem useful to my project. They are:³¹

1. Pointers: Simple points to some present object, "I want that one," with a finger point and a head nod, etc.
2. Pictographs: The drawing of a picture of an object in the air, such as "She looks like this," with an hourglass drawing.
3. Spatial: Shows size or relationship, "It was this big," with hands held an appropriate distance apart.
4. Kinetograph: Recreates some bodily action, such as "So I hit him," with the fist swinging through the air.
5. Batons: Movements which accentuate or punctuate, "I really (gesture) mean it (gesture)."
6. Ideographs: Trace the flow of an idea, "It's nice, but on the other hand..." (gesture flows).

American culture is rich, in my opinion, in all six of these categories. My study concentrates primarily on pictographs and kinetographs, although I will show examples of the others, too.

Another discussion of nonverbal communication is found in Gumperz's and Hymes' volume, Directions in Sociolinguistics. The authors quote Paul Ekman (et al) of the University of California as defining five major categories of

nonverbal behavior:³²

1. Emblems: Nonverbal acts which have a direct verbal translation.
2. Illustrators: Movements tied to speech which serve to illustrate the spoken word.
3. Affective Displays: Such as facial signs indicating happiness, surprise, fear, and so on.
4. Regulators: These are acts which maintain and regulate the act of speaking.
5. Adaptors: Signs originally linked to bodily needs, such as brow-wiping, lip-biting, etc.

I would add a sixth category, designed specifically for the ESL teacher and that would be Imitators. These would be gestures illustrative in nature and which represent specific vocabulary words; they would be imitative in general. Examples of this type might be putting the thumb into the mouth for the verb, to drink, or moving the forefinger and middle finger as in "walking" along, or placing the hands with the palms together to imitate praying. (See my article "Pedagogical Gestures in the ESL Classroom," found elsewhere.) Most of the American gestures that I have documented in this project may be regarded as Emblems, according to Ekman's definitions.

A word to the wise is probably in order at this point. "Gestures may get you into trouble, or at least put you in difficult situations, if you do not know the cultural implications of different gestures."³³ As I have noted in my discussion of the various gestures, many of them have different meanings in different contexts and in different countries. Take, for instance, our A-OK sign (#30), perfectly innocent and free of obscenity here, it becomes a vulgarity in certain Latin countries. The same can be said for our Thumbs Up ges-

ture - in Iran it is probably the most obscene gesture one can make. It is important to gather the "meaning" of a gesture by viewing it contextually and in two specific senses. These are: 1) the situational context within a given cultural or subcultural setting, and 2) the context provided by the linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, and possibly other as yet unanalyzed signal material which may or may not be present.³⁵ This is the advice of Hayes in his excellent article, "New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching." In short, we must know what the person is doing in order to correctly analyze and understand any gesture. This is true for most body movements.

On this subject, Harrison says, "Because they originate within cultures, emblems may cause particular difficulty to the international traveler."³⁶ He gives the somewhat humorous example³⁷ of the Soviet leaders, when appearing in this country, who frequently make a common Russian gesture - the clasped hands held over the head. To the American, this is used for victorious boxers or wrestlers and is a symbol of one's superiority. (See gesture #29.) Confusion can very well arise in situations such as these. In the same light, the ESL student should be guided in the learning of when to use our gestures - oftentimes, my students would use them indiscriminately, too often, more as a plaything than a tool for communication; hence, much of their real impact was lost.

AMERICANS AND THEIR GESTURES

"In the study of gestural movement and actions of Americans, it should be kept in mind that the framework is one in which the emphasis is generally upon doing rather than upon esthetic or speculative questioning of what is done."³⁸ We are people of action, Ruesch and Kees claim in their book on non-verbal communication, and our gestures don't reflect the careful stylization of the French, or the interpersonal involvements of the Italians' motions (see my comments on Cross-Cultural analyses in the Discussion above). Many of my acquaintances, when told of my ambition to find and describe typically American gestures, looked rather dumbfounded and claimed that Americans have no gestures to call their own, only some borrowed ones. I, as I have mentioned, was of like persuasion, until I looked more closely. Much observing and cataloging and photographing later, I would now dare to describe American gestures as being purposeful (to indicate direction or to communicate despite local noise), and concise. But at the same time, there are a great many which seem faddish, used by only a small group of people, or used in jesting and poking fun, with no serious communicative value. An example would be the imitative "Maverick" gesture where one makes the thumb and forefinger into a gun, takes careful aim along the index finger, pulls the thumb down in imitation of an old-fashioned pistol as an exploding sound is made through the mouth. Then the top of the forefinger is brought up to the mouth for a quick "blow" to cool off that hot explosion, and the "gun" is replaced in one's "holster" at hip level. Curious! But very limited in usage, and for this reason I have not included it in my study; there have been many such gestures which I have chosen to eliminate because of narrowness or near-obsolence.

There are some universal characteristics that can be stated of Americans:

we frequently hold our arms atill and move just our heads or upper bodies in rhythm to our speech, in a seemingly restrained fashion compared to many Mediterranean peoples. We move our hands and arms often very haphazardly, with little purpose or meaning sometimes, making circles and punching or fluttering.

Our movement, especially in walking, is quite characteristic, according to foreigners. Women don't pitter with tiny steps as do the Orientals, nor do they carefully balance on high heels as they walk as some more fashionable European women do. There is a lot of shuffling, it seems, and a lot of bouncing as we walk. "An American often walks with swinging arms and a rolling pelvis as though moving through a space unlimited by human or physcial obstacles."⁴⁰ Young boys seem especially lanky and loose compared to other cultures in their gait; I can often pick out Americans on a European street with some accuracy merely by observing them shuffle and bounce.

Hayes (1954) hypothesized that many American gestures arose from World War II: that secrecy in troop movements led to the "silence" gesture (#9), that the Fascist salute took on new meanings,⁴¹ and so forth. I mention the V-for-Victory sign (#10), and the A-OK sign (#30) as having roots in the War, and being still quite common today.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

Hayes has this to say on the documentation of gestures: "Written descriptions of postures are rare in ethnographic literature, and when they do occur, they are often so ambiguous as to be almost worthless unless supported by photographs or drawing."⁴²

It was a big question for me at the outset of this project as to what my visual medium would be - videotape, drawings, photography, movie. I had seen books which used drawing and especially photography fairly well. They seemed very static, though, and unable to express the movement found in most gestures. But a film, or video, I decided, would be inaccessible to most readers. I admired Wylie's work in Beaux Gestes for its explicitness and clarity. And given that I have trouble drawing even stick figures, I decided photography would be my best medium. There was some question about my posing for all the pictures, even those which are usually performed by men (such as The Hourglass, #5), or by blacks (such as The Black Fist of Power, #23); I therefore coralled men and blacks into posing for a few gestures. Also, working within restraints of time, budget and facilities, I was not able to use strobe photography or other techniques to show full movement and detail in certain gestures. This may be attempted at a later date.

INVENTORY OF NORTH AMERICAN GESTURES

AND

COMMENTARY

CHILDRENS' GESTURES

#1 TONGUE PROTRUSION:

In Tibet it means polite deference; in China it indicates embarrassment; in India, rage; in New Caledonia it is a show of vigor and sex.⁴³ LaBarre (1964) has even more curious usages of the tongue protrusion; In the Sung Dynasty China, it was a gesture of mock terror, performed in ridicule. Among the Ovimbundu of Africa, bending the head forward and sticking out the tongue means, "You're a fool." In Mayan statues of the gods, the protruded tongue signifies wisdom.⁴⁴

In America it is a display of mild contempt, provocative mockery or defiance. In another context, it may indicate mild pique, common enough as a playful gesture among women, according to Hayes.⁴⁵ Even further still, it could indicate, especially among young children, extreme concentration. Here, I have chosen the context of two children quarrelling or insulting each other. It is usually performed quickly, thrusting the tongue out while leaning defiantly

toward the other person, then retracting the tongue immediately afterward.

Probably the insulter would also taunt with a "Nnnyyyehhh!!"

#2 : DONKEY EARS:

Often in conjunction with the Tongue Protrusion (see #1), children will insert their thumbs into their ears and wag their straightened hands tauntingly at the other person, as if to say "You can't catch me!" This is an old gesture and most likely represents the ears of a donkey or an ass, and so has the connotations of that animal - stupidity, stubbornness, cloddiness.



In my questioning of friends, there seems to be some confusion with this gesture. Some think it is in some way related to the cuckolding gesture (see Thumbing the Nose, #26), while others insist that it is merely a representation of the devil. The index finger and the third finger are placed behind the head of a companion (left, in the photograph), in a V-configuration, which may represent the horns of a cuckolded man, or may signify the horns of the devil. It has passed out of current usage and we use it now usually only in jest or play. This points out the fact that many gestures may have currency for a while, and then drop out of usage. Certainly this gesture has changed meanings since Colonial days, when adultery was severely punished. A variation is performed by leaving the index and little fingers extended, representing the horns of a bull; the gesture is often accompanied by the expression, "Bullshit." (at right in photo). Also, children will often make these signs behind a friend's head during picture-taking for a laugh.

#4 : NOSE-HOLDING:

Often if something smells bad (literally or figuratively), we will hold our noses with the thumb and forefinger. We usually say "P.U." (meanings and origin of these two letters unclear - perhaps they only represent the sound "pfhew" that we make).

ADULT GESTURES

#5 : HOUR GLASS:

There are probably as many gestures to indicate admiration of a passing woman who delights the male eye as there are men standing idly on corners watching them. The wolf whistle has long been popular; in Latin America, the ssss-ing sound is quite common, but mostly to attract the passing female's attention. The A-OK sign (#30) may be used between two American men, or merely a suave turning-down of the lips and raising of the eyebrows--"not bad." Perhaps a more graphic representation is the hour glass depiction of a woman's body. Here, the man traces out in the air for his neighbor with broadened palms that flow in and out, the shape of an hour glass, the proportions of the female in question. The eyes usually follow the gesture downwards, and a smile and raised eyebrows are also common, possibly accompanied by a soft whistle. Such language as "stacked," "a beauty," or "man, was she built," might also be used.

#6 : THE CROOKED FINGER--BECKONING:

In many other countries around the world, people call to each other with their whole hand and even the arm in some instances. (Americans also have a wide, full-arm swing inwards to beckon to someone far away.) Most commonly, in Arab and Latin cultures, the hand is waved downwards in a snappy motion from the wrist and this means, "Come here." This is also used to hail taxis and buses. Americans might confuse this with a good-bye gesture to a small child in this country. (A friend of mine in an Arab country was beckoned while driving his car by a stationary policeman who wanted a few "words" with him about his speed. My friend, although baffled at the

the seemingly "farewell" meaning of the act, waved back and merrily drove on. He was hotly pursued by the policeman on his motorcycle and not only given a speeding ticket, but also plenty of verbal abuse for "eluding" an officer of the law!)

Americans signal to each other by crooking the index finger inwards and upwards several times. It is especially used in long distances, or in such quiet places as libraries, when words will not carry, or in trying to intimidate someone by appearing sinister, superior or angry while beckoning with the finger. It is usually a wordless signal.

7 : THE REPRIMANDING FOREFINGER:

This gesture is interchangeable with "TSK-TSK" (# 8) and is used in many of the same reprimanding situations. It is more common. The forefinger is pointed at the offender and is shaken up and down several times for emphasis or punctuation to the reprimands, threats, etc. The hand is often cocked toward the offender as well. Probably the authority figure would say while gesturing, "Now don't you ever do that again," or "I told you not to..."

8 : TSK-TSK: SHAME ON YOU!

Most likely an older gesture that may now be nearing extinction, this reprimanding gesture is now rarely used seriously. If someone does use it, it is probably in jest or in fun, mocking someone or playfully belittling them. It is probably associated more with young children when they have done wrong. While pointing an accusing index finger at the child, the index finger of the other hand is brushed along the top of it. Accompanying verbal behavior might include the clicking "tsk-tsk" or the words, "shame on you!"

CONVENTIONAL GESTURES

9 : THE HUSH - SSSSHHH!




This gesture is found in many cultures and is used to ask for quiet. The "shush" - ing noise may or may not accompany the gesture. The index finger is always used, and placed lightly on slightly puckered lips. The gesture is used most often with small children, in already quiet situations, such as libraries, or in audiences or groups of spectators when silence is desired. People will sometimes eliminate the finger on the lips and merely aspirate noisily (sss-sound), which should not be confused with hissing.

10: PEACE:

This V-like sign became popular in the 1960's among flower children and "doves" during anti-war protests, rock concerts, sit-ins, and so on. Curiously, it is a backward version of the famous V-for-Victory sign that was used and made popular during the Second World War by Sir Winston Churchill and others in the military. Somehow, Nixon adopted it during his many campaigns, and used it with both hands on outflung arms to dramatize his efforts.

The peace sign is a gentle gesture, very static and thus appropriate for photographs at strikes, sit-ins and the like. It may be related to the

peace symbol, although as an inversion. 

Although it can be a silent gesture, many people will merely say "Peace" as they flash the sign, or utter some now-out-of-date slang such as "Right on!" or "Love, man."

#11: THE OATH:



In courts, the witness is required to raise the right hand, and with a Bible under the left, swear an oath. This goes back centuries apparently, and is most memorable in Jacques Louis David's painting called "Le Serment du Jeu de Paume."

#12: SO-HIGH:

In most Latin countries, people will indicate height of children and other people with their hands held palm toward the listener, with the top of the fingertips marking the height. Ironically, when they are showing the height of animals, they will employ the same gesture that we as Americans use for people - the hand and fingers straightened and flattened out parallel to the ground, and placed at the appropriate height. This may cause some embarrassment if we go ahead and use our own gesture in those countries, and accidentally refer to people as animals.

#13: HITCHHIKING:

I have seen all types of stances for hitchhiking in my travels; in some countries the thumb is pointed downwards toward the ground from a stiff, extended arm; in others, the thumb is up, the arm stiff. In still others, a jerky motion with the whole bent arm is made (as in 1950s movies), signalling backwards in the direction the hitcher wishes to go. In some countries where there is very little traffic passing, the hitcher will merely step right into the road and flag down the oncoming vehicle, with the whole hand and arm. Even within the United States, there are many variations. However, I am convinced that they are due to the degree of boredom, fatigue and the amount of expertise that the hitcher has; also the urgency

of the situation. Usually, the hitcher here will keep the arm fairly low, even right by the side, and extend the thumb upwards. Some more zealous hitchers will keep the arm right straight out at right angles to the body. Others, perhaps more seasoned, have done away with the thumb and the arm, and simply hold out a sign indicating their desired destination; some of these get even more relaxed and sit down on their knapsacks. I've even seen hitchers with their backs to oncoming traffic, their thumb extended as they walk! Probably the degree of honestnes and hopefulness in the facial features determines success on the highways, too.

#14: HANDSHAKES: (Slap Me Five and The Businessman)

#15:

The handshake is really as old as The Odyssey (book xvii, 236) but was really born of mutual distrust - men would grab each others' hands to be sure that they concealed no weapons.⁴⁶ The handshake is perhaps used with much more frequency in other countries than in the United States, although recently women have become more confident about extending and receiving hands for shaking in greeting. Also, now in the United States, there is a lot of back-slapping that takes the place of or supplements handshakes. There are many curious variations of the conventional handshake, and some of them are only found in "secret" clubs or groups.



Slap Me Five: This is a rather "hip" variation of a handshake in America, and is used primarily among the young, and particularly among team members of a sport. It is a congratulatory gesture, and is performed by laying out one's palms, face up, and saying "Gimme five (or ten)" and waiting for the ensuing slap downwards of another person's hands. Often then, the pro-

Inventory of Typical American Gestures

You are responsible for the return of this book.

[illegible]

cedure is reversed quickly, with the first slapping the palms of the second. It is usually done loudly, jubilantly and quickly in moments of victory, glee or satisfaction.



The Businessman: This handshake can incur almost instantaneous distrust of this very forward person (usually a large-sized man). The businessman, in all his earnestness to sell and convince, will take the other's hand with his right, but then also grab the other person on the forearm or even above the elbow and begin pumping while talking rapidly. He apparently thinks that this body contact is one means of appearing warm and friendly - but it is very out of context. It is not uncommon, also, for these people to give vice-like handshakes, long and strong and sometimes even painful.

16: PATRIOTISM:



The right hand is placed solemnly over the heart in an air of serious attention as an American hears or recites The Pledge of Allegiance or the Star-Spangled Banner. One stands at "attention," straight, unmoving and with unchanging expression. The gesture here, obviously, is one of supposed emotion - that of patriotism, flowing from the heart, stemming and pulsating outwards throughout the body. We are "feeling" that pulse over the heart, perhaps.

Another significance of this gesture would be in a phoney and/or theatrical context where one would be imploring - "Please believe me!"



This seems to be a very recent gesture, and one that has proliferated in its usage. Perhaps this arises from our recent determination to always document our expression, to justify sources. Thus, when we orally quote a source, we used to say, "And I quote..." and finish with "End (or close) quote." Recently, however, these cumbersome words are being eliminated with this neat, deft gesture. Two fingers of each hand, in imitation of quote marks, are raised and are "scratched" in the air as the speaker is quoting. It is often used to dissociate one's self from the words, as in "The 'experts' say..." One wonders if we will eventually take on the imitation of parentheses, question marks and other punctuation in our gesturing!



In America, the wave is used as a salutation for a "hello" or a "good-bye" and is performed with the hand held high, flattened, palm away from the body; then the right-left-right vertical waving takes place. Wylie tells of a friend from Haiti who saw a Florida beauty queen atop her float in a parade in Port au Prince, waving innocently to the crowd, unaware that in Haitian gesture language, she was saying, "Screw you! Screw you!"⁴⁷ In other countries, such as Mexico, the palm is held towards the body with only the fingers moving in a clasp-unclasp motion (especially used with infants). Morris thinks the vertical up-down variety of the hand wave

47

is "clearly a way of patting the friend's body at a distance in anticipation of the embrace to come."⁴⁸ In Italy, the palm of the hand is held toward the speaker and the fingers make the motion of drawing the departing person back. In Spain, the movement is the same, but the hand is held horizontally. In France, the palm is frequently held facing the departing person, and the movement of the hand appears to push the departing person on their way.

#19: SALUTE:

"The salute began as an act of token submission: removing the hat as part of a formal bow. In earlier centuries, the bow was so deep that the doffed hat almost touched the floor." ⁴⁹ Also, we know that knights used to raise the visors of their helmets on meeting so they could recognize each other. Men used to touch the brims of their hats in deference to women. The American Indian "HOW" salute is related to the Fascist salute, which goes back to the days of Rome and the showing, peacefully, that no weapons were concealed. And the salute pictured here, the military salute, is probably related to at least some of these others. The stiff hand is brought up smartly and curtly to the temple. The hand either stays there, in anticipation of recognition from a superior, or is brought immediately and sharply back down to the side. The Boy and Girl Scout salutes, with either two or three fingers, are certainly related to the military salute here.



Certainly the former of these two gestures is an international sign recognized in most tourist restaurants around the world. The diner, after a meal, will signal readiness to accept the check to the waiter, who may be at some distance. He or she will do this in one of two ways: 1) by holding both hands high and "writing" or signing an imaginary check in the one hand; or 2) by simply raising a well-bred, right forefinger in order to catch the waiter's eye. At the same time, the diner may well mouth the words, "The check, please?"

GESTURES

of

COMPLICITY, DUPLICITY and FRATERNITY

#21: THE WINK:



Most definitely a gesture with many connotations, the wink is found in many countries. Here, with an enticing smile, it can be taken as a provocation, whereas with a straight face it shows complicity. If done in secret or on the sly to someone standing nearby, it will indicate that something about to be said to a third party will be said in jest, in fun, but that third person will not be aware of the game. In addition, the wink is quite often used just as a greeting between close friends when words are impossible (such as in a noisy factory) or not permitted (a library). One eye is winked quickly, sometimes almost imperceptibly, or perhaps in an exaggerated fashion, depending on context.

#22: HEY, GET A LOAD OF HIM (HER)!:



American children are taught not to point; pointing is impolite and causes embarrassment for both parties if someone is caught in the act. Now, however, it is common to use a more surreptitious form of pointing as a substitute for the blatant, accusing finger. Usually a thumb is hooked backwards, as in the picture, and jerked towards the subject, though held close to the body to avoid detection. At the same time, the head may cock in that same direction, with the eyeballs "pointing," rolling in that way, too. All these motions, if done in a quick, secretive moment, will make it clear to an accomplice just who it is that is being talked about. It is usually a quick maneuver, and wordless, so as to avoid any detection. A wink may also accompany this signal, again reinforcing the complicity between the two, and excluding the third. It is related to the Rib Jab, (see #24).

#23: BLACK FIST OF POWER:

Not necessarily a gesture of militancy or aggression, this raised fist has become widely understood in North America as representative of struggle and pride - particularly the black struggle for recognition and equality. It is often a quiet, determined, unambiguous motion of assertiveness. It was made famous by the black Olympic athletes in Mexico City in 1968 and is now quite a common gesture of fraternal bond.

The fist can be used in other ways, too; the fist shaken angrily at someone demonstrates extreme anger or threat.

#24: RIB JAB:

Another gesture of complicity or community that Americans frequently use is the jab in the ribs whereby one person will nudge or pretend to nudge a nearby friend or partner. Often the face is screwed up into a mocking pose as the jab is executed. The jabber wants to bring something to the attention of a friend, or at least to have something important shared. Consequently, they will often say as they jab, "Dja see that?" or "Get a load of that!" It can also be used in a bluffing or joking situation, but almost always signifies complicity or fraternity. Very often, the jaw is dropped to one side, as in the picture, as the jab takes place.



Many cultures indicate craziness, be it secretly or openly, by pointing to the brain in some way. The French twist their index fingers into their foreheads, probably indicating a "loose screw," inside; the Arabs touch their temples with a finger and twist it lightly while grimacing. Americans make circles near to, but not touching, the temple with the index finger. The circle is small and repeated several times; it indicates silently to another person who is "in" on the communication that a third party is slightly strange, goofy or crazy. The face is often twisted up into an accompanying grimace as no words are necessary. The eyes are often rolled in accompaniment to the circling motion. The origin of this gesture is probably the concept that someone's brains are all in disorder, going round and round.

GESTURES

of

INSULT AND VULGARITY



The origin of this gesture - one of the oldest and most widespread insults in the world - remains unknown. Folklorists call this the "Shanghai Gesture," and have made it the subject of learned dissertations! The term Shanghai, incidentally, has nothing to do with China, since the gesture is not known in the Orient! One of William Shakespeare's best-known comedy scenes in Romeo and Juliet is based on thumbing the nose. The Germans call it Die Lange Nase, the French call it Le Pied du Nez, the British call it Cocking a Snook.

It is usually thought to represent the hostile, erect comb of a fighting cock.⁴⁹ (Animal signs are a favorite form of insults in America as well as other countries. See #2 , Donkey Ears.) But the cockscomb sign has also been explained as a deformed salute, an imitation of grotesque, long-nosed

effigies, or the mock fighting of a catapult.⁵⁰ It is performed by placing the thumb on the tip of the nose and waving the fingers in the direction of the person to be mocked. Also, a sneer is prevalent. The French outdo the Americans by using both hands, joining the second thumb to the little finger of the first hand. In America, Thumbing seems to be dying out, succumbing to the recent popularity of The Finger (see #27).

27: THE FINGER

The Finger is an even older gesture than Thumbing the Nose (see #26). Classicists can point out passages indicating that Diogenes showed the Finger to Demosthenes, and that Caligula shocked the Romans by presenting his Finger rather than his hand to be kissed.⁵¹ In Latin the gesture is known as the *Digitus Obscenus* or *Digitus Impudicus*.⁵² However, we do not know how the ancients held the Finger - whether it was vertically, as we Americans do, or horizontally, as the French, or more hidden in the palm, like the Arabs.

Another name for this, the best-known American gesture, is "Flipping the Bird." The middle finger of either hand is raised vertically, keeping the

rest of the hand in a fist. It is an obscene gesture, frowned upon in many places, and not considered in good taste for most situations. (ESL students should be warned of this.) It is usually used in anger, scorn or hatred. Accompanying verbal insults might include, "Fuck you!" or "Up yours!" It is an indelicate gesture considered most offensive to older people; however, it appears also to be used by intimates in a joking manner.

GESTURES
of
JUBILATION AND APPROVAL

#28: THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN:

When a Roman gladiator was defeated in combat in the arena, he might be spared, or killed on the spot by his victor; the spectators could influence the decision by the position of their thumbs (not unlike the handkerchief signalling in modern-day bullfight arenas). The gesture for death was a thrust of the thumb downwards, probably imitating a sword being thrust into the victim. Some experts say that the thumbs up sign meant that the gladiator's life was to be spared, but this can not be substantiated.

Nowadays, we use the thumb to mean, "OK, fine, good, positive, affirmative," to offer encouragement and so forth. It has been used in these

contexts since the popularity period of WWII. Some Americans, to exaggerate an opinion in the negative, will thrust both thumbs down together, with a grimace, and this has been incorporated into many occupations such as refereeing, airplane directing, etc.

#29: VICTORY!:

This is a traditional posture used by boxers, wrestlers and other athletes (and now the common folk) as a display of triumph or victory. The victor expresses his or her sudden increase in status by raising the height in some way,⁵³ such as this one, or by jumping up and down, or lifting the victor onto the shoulders of teammates, fans, etc. The gesture also has been likened to triumphant Roman warriors in the early times.

#30: A-OK:



This is probably the classic American gesture. When we want to let someone else know that things are fine, or going smoothly, or even perfectly, or when we want to signal that something was very well done, we use this gesture. It signifies perfection, approval, admiration, "par excellence," a job well done, or almost anything else in a positive, rewarding vein. The forefinger and the thumb are joined to make a circle and the other three fingers stand straight as the circle is flashed. "This sign derives from a gesture people all over the world make unconsciously when making a fine point. To say that something is precise or exact, we go through the motions of holding something very small between the tips of our forefinger and thumb, which then automatically forms a ring."⁵⁴ In America, it evolved into a gesture signalling completion, and people of all professions and classes use it, I believe. Another local interpretation of

the A-OK sign, which may or may not be valid, comes from a beer-loving friend who insists that the circle was used to order Ballantine beer back in the 1950's; apparently this particular brand of beer had as its symbol three interlocking circles - quality, purity and excellence. By holding up a circle in a bar, the drinker thus signalled to the bartender that he wanted a Ballantine. It then gradually evolved into a generalized gesture of something of good quality.

A word to the wise: This gesture can have other meanings in other countries, and caution should be used abroad. In Japan, it means money (coins being circular in shape); in France, it means "nothing" or "worthless" because it looks like a zero; and in other places it symbolizes the genitals of a woman and is used to insult.

GESTURES

of

HOPE AND GOOD LUCK

#31: FINGER CROSSING:

When Americans say, "Keep your fingers crossed," they are historically requesting an act of Christian worship.⁵⁵ Crossing oneself - making the sign of the cross by moving the arm downward and then sideways in front of the body - is an ancient protective device of the Christian church.⁵⁶ In earlier times, crossing the second finger tightly over the first was the secret version of this, and was done with the hand carefully hidden from view.⁵⁷ Now, Americans use this merely as a casual wish for good fortune. Also, it is done secretly to protect oneself from the consequences of lying (or crossing anything--feet, arms, legs--for that matter!). The second and third finger of both hands may be used, or only those of one hand. This will assure the person that no bad luck will slip through their tightly locked fingers. Interestingly, this crossing of the fingers can also indicate close friends in American culture - "Those two are like this," (gesture).

#32: KNOCK ON WOOD:

This gesture, which symbolizes hope for good luck and is used to propitiate the gods, has a curious angle to it. Originally, when someone wanted to wish for good luck, or to show their fervent hopefulness in some way, they would rap their knuckles on a nearby wooden table or chair, and say, "Knock on wood" (historical significance unknown). Now, however, it is my hypothesis that, there being fewer and fewer wooden furnishings in our buildings, having succumbed to plastics and metals, people have started rapping their knuckles on their heads as a humorous substitute! (They do

not intentionally debase themselves by insinuating that their heads are wooden, however!) The words "Knock on wood" are almost always uttered in conjunction with the rapping. Also a hopeful look is assumed in the eyes and face. If a wooden object is in sight, then the person will probably use that.

SELF-CONGRATULATORY GESTURES



Another quite "hip" gesture these days is yet another one of complacency with self, or pride, or self-satisfaction. Here, when a witticism is right on target, or when a very apropos comment is delivered, or a cut-down well executed, the person will quickly lick the tip of the forefinger and on an imaginary chalkboard in the air, make a downward stroke in imitation of a point. Why the finger is licked is unknown (perhaps similiar to licking the tip of a pen to get it started?), but we can assume that with no chalk handy, a wet, black mark on the blackboard would have to suffice to show the scores.

34: POLISHING THE MEDAL:

One of the ways Americans shine up dull objects is by blowing hot air on the surface and then rubbing the object onto the sleeve or shirt front or shirttails, as in apple polishing, glasses cleaning and here, medal polishing. The gesture is a facetious one, because the person in truth does not possess a medal. But they have just performed well, attracted admiration, said something extremely witty, or some such feat, and now they are collecting their due praise. The person blows hot air into the front of the knuckles of one hand, and then proceeds to "shine" the knuckles on the chest, with a smug look of satisfaction on the face. It is usually a wordless gesture, and is much used by the younger generation.

#35: SUSPENDER THUMB-HOOK:



This gesture seems to be of obscure origin, but does have some history in that it appears to be related to times when people (men) wore suspenders. The thumbs would be hitched under the straps at armpit level (now we put our thumbs right under the armpit, as hardly anyone wears suspenders!), and then they would rock backwards on their heels, or perhaps in a chair, with a broad grin of pride. The meaning of this gesture is something close to self-righteousness, smugness and satisfaction with one's self. It could have some boastfulness about it, depending upon the context. Occasionally, too, this gesture is used merely as an imitation or impersonation of a farmer or a so-called "hillbilly."

GESTURES
of
NERVOUSNESS, IMPATIENCE
and
BOREDOM

#36: BITING FINGERNAILS:

Many people here have the habit of unconsciously biting their fingernails. Some people think it is a sign of nervousness or of a high-strung person. Freud would probably speak to the oral nature of the habit. But sometimes we consciously exaggerate this habit at a moment of fear, or nervous anticipation to show others our emotions. The fingernails of one (or both) hands are inserted between the teeth and a nervous chewing activity is simulated as the mouth is stretched open in a grimace while the brow is furrowed in fear or panic.

#37: TWIDDLING THE THUMBS:

Like Foot Tapping and Here We Go Again, this very old gesture is a display of impatience or boredom. It shows that the person has little else to do at the moment but fiddle, and play with the hands, accomplishing nothing while waiting. The hands are interlocked at the fingers, and the two thumbs are rotated around each other. Usually a look of utter boredom is assumed in the face - eyes rolling, head cocked backwards, and features elongated in apathy, indifference, or boredom as mentioned. A sigh can be emitted to further punctuate the gesture.

#38: SHOULDER SHRUG:

This gesture of ignorance, indifference or innocence seems to be quite universal; at least it is used with the same meanings in many of the cultures I have seen. It consists of hunching the shoulders upwards, and sometimes spreading out the arms, palms upwards with a downturned mouth and a head tilt--all of which says, "I don't know," or "How do you expect me to know?" or even "What do I care?" (These expressions will often accompany the gesture.) Sometimes, it is abbreviated by merely shrugging up only one shoulder quite quickly; then it is understood that the person is disengaging themselves from the responsibility of knowing or caring. Perhaps it symbolizes the shrugging off of that onus.

#39: HERE WE GO AGAIN!

Here, we utilize the whole body: the person will lean back slightly as if propping up against a wall; the head is cocked backwards; the arms may be crossed and uncrossed with boredom, and the fingers may begin drumming insidiously along the upper arm; the eyes roll upward in a sign of being bored and impatient; finally, the foot is extended and may begin tapping, too, in a gesture of being fed up or very impatient that things begin moving more quickly. This posture could be used at boring meetings, (though sitting down), or when someone is rambling on incessantly, etc. It is a wait for action, and possibly a sign of nervousness. Some body language experts claim the stance is one of self-defense and an attempt at superiority. Usually only an airy, although very audible and forced sigh accompanies this gesture, or an "Oh boy!" drawn out, or "Not again!"

OTHER GESTURES

#40: MMMMmmmm GOOD!:



Whereas we as children were reprimanded for licking our fingers in order to get those last crumbs and flavor (or just to clean up a little), it was always accepted to lick the lips. It is a sign of appreciation for good-tasting food. The tongue is rolled from one side of the mouth to the other across the lips, and usually one says, "MMMMmmmm!" since speech is practically impossible with the mouth full! Also, the gesture can be seen before a meal, when someone is hungrily eyeing the groceries or the prepared dishes, and is lustily thinking of the culinary pleasure about to ensue.

#41: WHOA! WAIT A MINUTE NOW!



"Now hold on!," "Hey, take it easy," "Back off!," "Uh, just a minute there," "Now hang on a minute," all may be verbal colloquial expressions that go with this gesture. The hands and the arms are outspread as if to protect one's self, and the palms may be moved vertically, slowly once or twice to encourage the other person to calm or slow down, or perhaps to relax a moment. A frown will add reproach or even discouragement to the stance.

#42: STUPID ME!



We often berate ourselves in times of seeming stupidity, ignorance or forgetfulness once there is some kind of revelation of our error. As in the photograph, we may actually strike our foreheads with the flat, open, base part of the palm, at the moment of realization. A look of anguish or "pain" is also often in evidence, but the anger is directed towards oneself; thus the punishment of hitting one's head. (A variation would be the simulated, or real pulling out of one's hair!)

#43: HORRORS!

Why do we suddenly clap a hand over our mouths? To hide something? To prevent a scream or stifle a gasp? To avoid exposing a gaping mouth? Probably the answer is any or all of the above, depending on context. We perform this sudden clapping, accompanied by wide eyes and an expression of alarm, in moments of realizing one's forgetfulness, of sheer horror or terror, of fear, surprise, disbelief. It is an all-encompassing gesture that eliminates the necessity of speaking, or voicing one's sudden emotion, although it may be accompanied by any of a whole array of exclamations.

#44: THE LIGHTBULB:

A sharp snap upwards with the fingers, a face suddenly lit up with revelation, widened eyes and lifted eyebrows, and a smile could characterize this very common gesture. The answer has been figured out, an ingenious idea has been thought of, a long-time puzzle has been solved, and it all comes in a flash. "That's it!" or "Ah-hah! I've got it!" or some other exhortatory expression usually accompanies the snap. Even an inspired top-teeth hitch over the lower lip as the face lights up will portray the revelation or sudden recall.

#45: CRAFTY SNIDELY WHIPLASH:

Here, the eyes portray much of the meaning of the gesture, by being wide, and filled with cunning. Some will interpret the gesture as one of glee, anticipation or satisfaction. The hands are clasped and rubbed slowly together while the person assumes a rather hunched posture. In addition, the head and eyes can shift laterally, as if looking around for possible spies or dangers to the proposed scheme. Such verbal behavior as, "Well, well, well!" or "Now what have we got here!" or "Ah-hah! Now I've got you!" might accompany the gesture. Actors in Frankenstein and other horror pictures use this often to reveal their plots of shrewdness.

#46: SCRATCHING THE NOGGEN:

When Americans are baffled, they very often just put one hand on a hip, and use the other hand to "scratch" the side or the back of the head. In addition, the nose, mouth and eyes are wrinkled up in puzzlement as the "scratching" takes place. (There is no physical itching; it can only be surmised that the scratching somehow symbolizes grating or scraping the brain in an effort to get down to the core: understanding.) Eyes are cast down to the floor or up to the ceiling in a concerted effort to comprehend.

Almost anything can verbally accompany the gesture, such as, "Gee, I don't know," or merely a puzzled, grunted "Mmmmm?"

#47: WHEW! CLOSE CALL!:

Here, an American, to show obvious relief after a "close call" or harrowing moment, will pretend to wipe imaginary (or real!) sweat off the forehead and shake it off the fingers to the ground. The hand will often-times stay shaking down, probably to indicate trembling fear. Usually, the person will let out a breathy "Whew!," or "That was close!" exclamation to emphasize the sense of relief.

#48: THROAT SLIT:

The historical significance of this gesture can only be assumed to be the custom of guillotining prisoners, chopping off their heads at the neck with sharp blades. We in America will often imitate this loping-off motion with our index fingers drawn across the throat, and put a look of fright or dread on the face. Usually one will speak to that effect, saying something like, "Boy, I've had it!" or "Now I'm in for it!"

WHY USE GESTURES?

The ESL teacher might well consider the goals of incorporating gestures into the classroom. Why use them? To what ends? I maintain that the natural (i.e. unaffected) usage of these native American gestures will inject greater authenticity to the portrayal of culture, that is, culture with a small "c", not formal Culture such as literature. "The area of deep culture proves to be more interesting. Some of the most elusive features of deep culture are the nonlinguistic aspects of human communication. Most foreign language teachers are unfamiliar with the terms paralinguistics and kinesics, the two sciences which analyze and describe extralinguistic features."⁵⁸ Whereas many gimmicks have been devised to increase cultural understanding (poems, songs, field trips, tongue twisters, language clubs, dances, A-V materials, games in the foreign language), little has been done with gesture.⁵⁹ It seems to me that it would be fairly easy to devise a text in the ALM fashion of using dialogues, and consistently and authentically incorporate American gestures in accompaniment to the lines; the students would then act them out, using their hands, face, fingers, etc. In essence, then, we as teachers would be almost unconsciously imparting to our foreign students (with out native kinesic knowledge) a sense of what is standard or fitting/unfitting or even "hip" in the body movements of Americans. We would be excellent models.

The use of pedagogical gestures has a lot of advantages, too. (See my article "Pedagogical Gestures in the ESL Classroom," found elsewhere.) They can be used to prompt, cue, correct, explain vocabulary, control and discipline and orchestrate.

Finally, a teacher might use gestures simply for animation, or liveliness, humor. Also, of course, they render clarity to speech. It is in-

contestable that the animated teacher will be much more successful in heightening student interest than the stiff, seated, expressionless teacher. It should be remembered that gestures are not usually replacements for speech, but are complements. They should be clear-cut, succinct and economical for the best results. The ESL teacher should perform them so that they enhance and harmonize with the verbal message.

HOW

Before giving some sample dialogues and suggestions for application of gestures in the ESL classroom, a few pointers might be in order on just how to use gestures, how to make them a successful part of the class:

1. Especially with pedagogical gestures, but with specific American gestures, too, introduce them early on in the course, just to provide exposure. Explanations may come later, but it is important that the students see them early on, as long as they are in context and are naturally executed.
2. Bring attention to them gradually, exaggerate them if necessary, repeat them so all can see, and explain them finally if there seems to be any confusion - or ask the students what they think they might mean. You might even take part of the hour to demonstrate several gestures in a row, allowing guessing and discussion by students.
3. Use them consistently, and in the same context, unless there could be several contexts for any one gesture.
4. Make your gestures clear, concise, unambiguous. Do them sharply and with confidence.
5. Encourage your students to adopt them if they wish, in their speech. Also, encourage them to invent gestures of their own for general use. And, it is always very interesting and usually humorous to have students offer their own gestures from their countries, to be followed by some cross-cultural analyses and explanations. They are usually very eager to do this.
6. Use dialogues and other classroom techniques to bring further attention to specific gestures found in American society (see following section).

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

There are many ways in which the preceding material can be brought into the ESL classroom, in order to bring the gestures alive and to give them meaning. The goal of so doing would be to have students recognize, or at least be aware of American gestures, but not necessarily to incorporate them into their English (this might seem unnatural and awkward for them). In this section I propose a few practical techniques for the application of American gestures in the ESL setting.

1) Take the time early on in the course to merely expose the students to several gestures, allowing them to guess the meanings. Do a comparative study, as a class project or in groups, of the gestures of the students' individual cultures. Find out which ones co-incide with American ones, but especially discover what differences there are in the use of one gesture.

2) Dialogues:

Dialogues, ALM style and/or using role play, seems to be one of the best ways to have students assimilate information they have acquired about American culture and, here, gestures. Of necessity, these dialogues would contain a lot of slang, jargon, idioms and colloquial expressions. They should be kept short, allowing for the possibility of three or four gestures at most. My students enjoyed assuming the role of an American Cool Guy, and really "slapping five" or "flipping the bird," and it is a fun vehicle for laughs and a pleasant atmosphere. However, as mentioned, some students may feel hesitant about assuming these foreign (to them) mannerisms. The goal is more one of recognition than assimilation.

Below are a few sample dialogues which may be used, or may serve as a springboard for the creation of others. Also, provide the students with the opportunity to write their own.

1) Cool Hand Luke:

Cool Man #1: "Hey, man! What's happening?" (slaps five)

Cool Man #2: (returns the slap) "Hey, not much.

Life's a drag." (twiddles thumbs)

Cool Man #1: "Hey, I've got an idea! (the lightbulb finger snap)

Let's go get a pizza downtown!"

Cool Man #2: "Right on!" (A-OK sign)

You've always got the bright ideas."

Cool Man #1: "Naturally, man." (Polishes the medal)

2) The Swimming Race:

Connie: "Oh, I'm so nervous!" (bites fingernails)

Betsy: "Aw, cut it out. You'll do fine."

Connie: "I want to win this race so much." (crosses fingers for good luck)

Betsy: "Oh, you'll do it. Today will be your lucky day."

Connie: "Let's hope so. Knock on wood." (knocks on head)

--later--

Betsy: (calling and flashing a Thumbs Up): "Hey, that was a great race!"

Connie: (victory clasp over head) "Yay! Give me five!" (slaps with Betsy)

3) Kids Squabbling:

Johnny: "Hey, give me my shoes!"

(they wrestle)

Franky: "You creep." (Tongue protrusion)

Johnny: "MOM! (hollers) Franky won't give me my shoes!"

Franky: (taunts with Donkey Ears) "Nah, nah, nah, nah!"

(they crash into a chest of drawers and two dishes break)

Franky and Johnny: "Oh-oh! Now we're in for it!" (the throat slit)

Mother: "Oh no! (Horrors gasp) Grandma's best china!"

You rascals! (shakes a Reprimanding forefinger)

If I have to tell you one more time..."

F & J: (eyes roll in Here We Go Again)

Mother: "Now get out of here!" (points to the door)

Franky to Johnny: "Whew! (wipes forehead)

"Lucky thing she didn't ground us!"

4) Going to the Party:

George: "Are you coming with us to the party tonight?"

Bart: "Oh my gosh! (Stupid Me forehead slap) I completely forgot!"

George to James: (aside, with Rib Jab) "That guy forgets everything!"

Bart: "You two go on ahead.

I'll be there in 5 minutes."

James: "No, we'll wait for you.

But make it snappy." (snaps fingers)

(ten minutes later)

George: (foot tapping, Impatience) "Geez, what's taking this guy?"

James: (as Bart finally comes in) "Well, it's about time!"

Bart: "Sorry guys. I had to shave, and dress, and..."

James to George: (groans and rolls eyes: Here We Go Again)

George to James: (wink of complicity) "That wasn't long at all, Bart

Let's go!"

5) Girl-Watching:

Egor: "Hey! (nudges) Dja get a load of that babe!"

Ivan: "Wow! Not bad! (Hour Glass gesture) Not bad at all."

Egor: (Lightbulb finger snap) "I've got it!

Let's offer her a ride downtown.

We've got your car."

Ivan: (Snidely Whiplash hand rub) "Now you're talking.

Then you can split, and..."

Egor: (Whoa, Slow Down gesture) "Oh no you don't!

I'm coming, too."

Ivan: (winks in duplicity)"We'll see.

Here's hoping she'll take the ride." (Crosses fingers)

--they go off on the conquest--

3) The following ideas for the use of body language and gestures in lessons for ESL classroom were written up originally by Rebecca Cordozo of the School for International Training, 1977.

Initial Presentations

1. Using 15-20 set situations for which gestures are well established in many cultures:

- a) Have students go out and talk with native informants to find out the appropriate gestures for each situation, or if indeed specific gestures exist in each instance. (If the students are studying English in their own country and have no access to native speakers, the teacher would probably have to serve as the informant.)
- b) Have them watch American television or movies and make an inventory of gestures as a class project.
- c) Who uses gestures? Do people representing sub-cultures within one culture use the same gestures to represent the same ideas in similar situations? Have the students answer questions like these.
- d) Compare and contrast gestures of the students' languages and those of the one they are studying. Are they different? If specific gestures are common to both cultures, do they mean the same thing?
- e) In what types of situations are gestures most widely used? Formal, informal, etc. Are there situations where gestures are always appropriate, or never appropriate? What types?
- f) Are gestures an integral part of the language? In comparison to other languages the students have studied?

2. Have students work together on a list of emotions, feelings or physical

states such as boredom, interest, anger, delight, nervousness, embarrassment, confidence, fatigue, etc. for which gestures are commonplace. (The teacher might choose to make up a list and present it to students as an alternative.)

- a) Have students identify specific gestures or body language which represent these emotions or physical states.
- b) Do words and gestures always convey the same things? Do they always carry equal weight? What is the nature of certain gestures - voluntary, involuntary?

Other ideas:

1. Have students listen to a taped dialogue. They try to decide what gestures might or might not be appropriate. Students might then re-enact the dialogue in small groups supplying the appropriate gesture.
2. Pantomime: With gestures, students act out a dialogue. The rest of the class improvises lines which would fit the gestures. Two other students might then re-enact the dialogue with words and gestures. (This exercise might be assigned as homework and then presented the next day.)
3. Pantomime Game: Using the normal format for charades, dividing the class into teams, the teacher prepares a series of feelings, situations, etc. on slips of paper. Individual students draw a slip of paper and then respond with appropriate gestures. Other team members must guess what the student is attempting to portray.
4. Have students think of situations where meanings of language are altered or completely changed by gestures or other body language. Discussion of the circumstances under which such an alteration might take place. Why?
5. What types of gestures fall under the category of social custom? In

what types of situations do these gestures occur? Are they the same in the students' cultures and that of America?

6. Values Clarification - Using specific gestures which have strong cultural connotations (Winking, Hour Glass, Black Fist of Power), the teacher does the gesture and asks the students to write a word or sentence as a reaction to it. Discussion of how students reacted and why should follow.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 McQuown, 1970, p. 38.
- 2 Alfred Hayes, 1965, p. 284.
- 3 Francis Hayes, 1966, p. 627a.
- 4 Green, 1968, p. 6.
- 5 Fiel, 1970, p. 158.
- 6 Harrison, 1974, p. 100.
- 7 Websters Third New International Dictionary.
- 8 Wylie, 1977, p. xii.
- 9 "Speaking of Pictures..." Life, 1946, p. 13.
- 10 Reusch and Kees, 1966, p. 25.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Wylie, 1977, p. xii.
- 13 Harrison, 1974, p. 134.
- 14 Wylie, 1977, p. x.
- 15 Ruesch and Kees, 1966, pp. 23-24.
- 16 Ibid., p. 24
- 17 Efron, 1972, p. 28
- 18 Harrison, 1974, p. 124.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Mendelbaum, quoting Sapir, 1949, p. 106.
- 21 Hayes, Francis, 1957, p. 374.
- 22 Mendelbaum, quoting Spair, 1949, p. 556.
- 23 Green, 1968, p. 8
- 24 Efron, 1972, p. 21
- 25 Ibid., p. 22.
- 26 Ibid., p. 33
- 27 Birdwhistel, 1952, p. 3.
- 28 Birdwhistel, 1963, p. 123.
- 29 Walsh, 1963, p. 20.
- 30 Birdwhistel, 1952, pp. 78-79.
- 31 Harrison, 1974, p. 134.
- 32 Gumperz and Hymes, 1972, p. 383.
- 33 Wylie, 1977, p. viii
- 34 Hayes, Alfred, 1965m p. 284.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Harrison, 1974, p. 138.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ruesch and Kees, 1966, p. 35.
- 39 Birdwhistel, 1970, p. 376 - footnote.
- 40 Wylie, 1977, p. xi.
- 41 Hayes, 1957, p. 219.
- 42 Hayes, Alfred, 1965, p. 6.
- 43 Fred Breumig, Folklore Expert
- 44 LaBarre, 1964, p. 200.
- 45 Hayes, Alfred, 1965, p. 283.
- 46 Fiel, 1970, p. 159.
- 47 Wylie, 1977, p. xiii.
- 48 Morris, 1978, p. 58.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.

FOOTNOTES, con't

51Wylie, 1977, p. xi.

52Ibid.

53Morris, 1978, p. 56.

54Ibid.

55Ibid.

56Ibid.

57Ibid.

58Green, 1968, pp. 2-3.

59Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Birdwhistell, Ray L., An Annotation System for Analysis of Body Motion and Gesture, Washington, Foreign Service Institute, Dep't of State, 1952.

_____, Kinesics and Context, Essays on Body Motion Communication, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1970.

_____, "The Kinesic Level in the Investigation of the Emotions," Expression of the Emotions in Man, ed. Peter H. Knapp, International Universities Press, Inc., New York, 1963.

Brault, Gerard J., "Kinesics and the Classroom: Some Typical French Gestures," The French Review, XXXVI, Feb. 1963, pp. 374-382.

Breunig, Fred, of Brattleboro, Vermont. American Folklore expert.

Davidson, Levette J., "Some Current Folk Gestures and Sign Languages," American Speech, XXV, Feb. 1950, pp. 3-9.

Efron, David, Gesture, Race and Culture, Mouton & Co., The Netherlands, 1972.

Fast, Julius, Body Language, Pocket Books, New York, 1972.

Fiel, Maxine Lucille, "What His Hands Tell That He's Not Saying," Mile, 72: Nov. 1970, pp. 158-159+.

Gales, Evangeline, "The Language Teacher as Choral Director - Suggestions on the Use of Gesture," Hispania, XLIV, Dec. 1961, pp. 787-788.

"Gesture Language," Life, Vol. 18, Jan. 9, 1950, pp. 79-82.

Green, Jerald R., A Gesture Inventory for the Teaching of Spanish, Chilton Books/Educational Division, Philadelphia and New York, 1968.

Gumperz, John J., and Dell Hymes, eds., Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., USA, 1972.

Hall, Edward T., Beyond Culture, Anchor Press/Doubleday. New York 1976.

_____, The Hidden Dimension, Anchor Press/Doubleday, N.Y., 1969.

_____, The Silent Language, Anchor Press/Doubleday, N.Y., 1973.

Harrison, Randall P., Beyond Words: An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication, Prentice Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 1974.

Hayes, Alfred S., "New Directions in Foreign Language Teaching," The Modern Language Journal, XLIX: May, 1965, No. 5, pp. 281-293.

BIBLIOGRAPHY, con't.

- Hayes, Francis, "Gestures, A Working Bibliography," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 21: pp. 218-317, 1957.
- _____, "Gesture," Encyclopedia Americana, XII, 1966, p. 627a.
- Henley, Nancy M., Body Politics: Power, Sex and Nonverbal Communication, Prentice-Hall, Inc., New Jersey, 1977.
- Heyes, Gordon, "World Distribution of Certain Postural Habits," American Anthropologist, LVII, April, 1955.
- Kaulfers, Walter, "Curiosities of Colloquial Gesture," Hispania, Vol. XIV, No. 4, pp. 249-264.
- Key, Mary Ritchie, Nonverbal Communication - A Research Guide and Bibliography, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., New Jersey, 1977.
- King, William S., "Notes and Queries," Western Folklore, Vol. VIII, July, 1949, pp. 263-264.
- Krout, Maurice H., "Understanding Human Gestures," Scientific Monthly, Vol. 49, Aug. 1939, pp. 167+.
- LaBarre, Weston, "Paralinguistics, Kinesics and Cultural Anthropology," Approach to Semiotics, ed. by Sebeok, Hayes and Bateson, Mouton and Co., The Hague, 1964, pp. 191+.
- Lin, Nan, The Study of Human Communications, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., New York and Indianapolis, 1973.
- Mandelbaum, David G., ed., Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality, Univ. of Calif. Press, Berkeley, 1949.
- McQuown, Norman A., ed., The Natural History of an Interview, Grune and Stratton, New York, Chap. 4.
- Morris, Desmond, "Secrets of Man's Unspoken Language," Reader's Digest, Vol. 112, Jan. 1978, pp. 55-58.
- Pei, Mario, The Story of Language, Lippincott, Phil. and New York, 1965.
- Ruesch, Jurgen and Weldon Kees, Nonverbal Communication, Univ. of Calif. Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966.
- Saitz, Robert L., and Edward J. Cervenka, Colombian and North American Gestures: A Contrastive Inventory, Centro Colombo Americaca, Bogota, July 1962.
- "Speaking of Pictures...The French Still Talk Eloquently with Their Hands," Life, Vol. 11, Sept. 16, 1946, pp. 12-13.

BIBLIOGRAPHY, Con't.

Walsh, Donald D., comp., What's What, The Modern Language Assoc., New York, 1963.

Websters Third International Dictionary.

Weitz, Shirley, Nonverbal Communication: Readings with Commentary, Oxford Univ. Press, New York, London, Toronto, 1974.

Whiteside, Robert L., Face Language, Frederick Fell Publishers, Inc., New York, 1974.

Wylie, Laurence and Rick Stafford, Beaux Gestes, A Guide to French Body Talk, The Undergraduate Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1977.

Zunin, Leonard, with Natalie Zunin, Contact: The First Four Minutes, Nash Publishing, Los Angeles, 1972.

APPENDIX #1;

AND FURTHERMORE...
 Ideas for Continued Study in Gestures

I had intended to do a study originally on pedagogical gestures only, and then I got interested accidentally in typically American gestures. In looking for research on this topic, I spent most of my time reading studies of other cultures' gestures, notably European and Mediterranean. I also got sidetracked by discussions of the Deaf and Dumb Sign Language, and I began to think very seriously of doing some work in Mime. Soon, as the field widened and widened, I had a hard time restraining myself! I began to make a list of other possible topics related to gestures that might be of interest to myself later, or to someone else:

1. Sign Language for the Deaf and Dumb.
2. Pantomime--wordless skits and acts. This is often a studied and perfected act. There are now Mime companies in most major cities.
3. The fields of kinesics and paralanguage, discussed briefly in this paper, both dealing with body motion and other extralinguistic features.
4. Semiotics - for example, clothes and traffic signals.
5. North American Native Indian pasimology - a very rich and interesting field that deals with Indian "sign" language, also their smoke signals, grunts and other sounds used in place of words.
6. Windmill tilting on the plains to signal long ago to far-away neighbors.
7. Primate behavior and communication and experiments and research with apes, chimpanzees; teaching them to "understand" language. There is a strong indication that most primates "understand" language through gestural cues.

8. Professions and the use of gestures:

- stage and theater
- movies, television and other acting, (for example, "cut" is a common gesture here).
- policemen, especially in guiding traffic
- radio broadcasting
- surgery
- sports. Particularly referees' signals. We have adopted some of these into our every day speech, as the "Time-out" T-sign with the hands.
- band conductors
- crane operators
- stock brokers at Chicago's famous Board of Trade, for example
- airplane and aeronautic signalling
- factory workers' signals, to be understood above the noise
- truck drivers

All these people have special, sometimes very complex gestures in their fields of work.

9. Boy Scout and Girl Scout gestures, especially salutes.

10. Casino language

11. Silent movies, such as Charlie Chaplin, where facial expression, gesture and mime play an all-important role

12. Coronation gestures and procedures

13. Oaths - serious (as discussed in the paper) or play, such as "Cross my heart, hope to die; Stick a needle in my eye."

14. Solicitation gestures of addicts and prostitutes, especially eye-winks, and eye contact in general.

15. Biblical gestures - the Old Testament apparently is a storehouse of information on gestures used at that time.